

Massachusetts Department of Correction

Objective Point Base Classification Report

Fiscal Year 2024



Executive Office of Public Safety and Security
July 2024

Maura T. Healey, Governor
Terrence M. Reidy, Secretary of Public Safety and Security

**Department of Correction
Objective Point Base Classification Report to the
Joint Committee on Public Safety and
House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means
[Pursuant to DOC FY24 Budget Line Item 8900-0001]**

Pursuant to the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) line item 8900-0001 of the Fiscal Year 2024 General Appropriations Act, this report overviews the Objective Point Base (“OPB”) Classification system for all incarcerated individuals in state prison facilities.

Overview:

The OPB is the standardized custody level assignment of an incarcerated individual based on objectively defined criteria. The criteria are weighed, scored and organized into a valid and reliable classification instrument accompanied by an operational manual for applying the instrument to incarcerated individuals in a systematic manner. OPB classification systems rely on factors that have been proven to predict prison adjustment and address issues of overclassification and underclassification.

History:

The development of the DOC’s OPB Classification system began in 2002 with our request for technical assistance from the National Institute of Corrections. The system was introduced in 2006 and became fully operational at all facilities in 2008. Since this time, the tool has been modified which has increased the number of incarcerated individuals eligible for placement in lower security without compromising the safety and security of staff, incarcerated individuals and the public. Prior to any modification, research data was analyzed and indicated that DOC’s incarcerated individuals’ profiles were virtually the same. According to the US Department of Justice, NIC Series, *A Guide for Correctional Agencies, Objective Prison Classification*, revalidation of a prison classification system shall occur every three (3) to five (5) years. In 2013, DOC began a revalidation of the OPB classification tool to ensure its validity. Based on that review, several changes to the OPB form were implemented in 2014. Those changes included lowering the threshold score for males and females, as well as adjusting several variables to higher thresholds, all of which resulted in more incarcerated individuals obtaining classification for minimum custody.

In keeping with the recommended time frames the MA DOC, in 2018, initiated a second revalidation. The review was completed in May 2019, and all proposed changes were approved in September 2019. Approved changes were implemented on November 18, 2019, and included adjusting several variables/restrictions and adding a fourth age category for male incarcerated individuals, all of which resulted in more incarcerated individuals becoming eligible for placement in a lower security.

The Department is currently undergoing another revalidation. A Steering Committee was formed and includes a cross section of staff from multiple operational areas: classification, security, programs, research, legal, and external stakeholders. The committee is

responsible for assessing the current system; reviewing local and national research and trends; reviewing the current variables and overrides; developing cost-effective solutions; and if needed, will draft new policies and a revised classification instrument.

Specifically, the following steps have been taken:

- Formed a multi-disciplinary steering committee.
- Surveyed and studied other systems throughout the US.
- Researched changes in national trends.
- Analyzing and researching variables identified as possible areas of concern by outside stakeholders.
- Held interviews with staff and both male and female incarcerated individuals from all levels of security.
- Assessed each existing variable and override based on research, trends and interviews.
- Reviewed reports queried by DOC Research for analysis to assess the current tool's validity and to identify where potential changes may be needed to improve the validity of the tool.
- The committee is actively reviewing all results of interviews and research to make recommendations regarding potential updates or changes.

In June 2024, Minimum Security Restriction H was modified to exclude anyone who committed an offense resulting in a loss of life before their 21st birthday, thereby, significantly increasing the number of incarcerated individuals who will now be eligible for lower security.

Override Rates:

A necessary feature of an OPB Classification System is the use of overrides, which allows staff to depart from the scored custody level when appropriate. A restriction is when a Department of Correction ("DOC") policy prevents an incarcerated individual from placement in lower custody, regardless of their total score (e.g., incarcerated individuals whose immigration status is pending or those with an immigration detainer or deportation order are not to be considered for minimum or below). Classification staff has no authority to disregard these restrictions. An override is applied when a scored custody level is changed based on the professional judgment of trained classification staff. The use of overrides should be between 5% and 15% of the classified population.

Override Rates for DOC inmates as of July 1, 2024, are:

Higher Security	7%
Lower Security	5%
Total	12%

Custody Level Distribution:

Custody Level Breakdown for MA DOC Inmates
as of July 1, 2024

Maximum Security	13%
Medium Security	75%
Minimum Security or Below	12%

As of July 1, 2024, there are 5 incarcerated individuals on a waitlist for NCCI-Gardner due to bedspace. There are 8 incarcerated individuals awaiting necessary clearance in order to be eligible for transfer to minimum security.